



Request for Qualifications: Fiscal Agent to Serve the Northeast Regional Ocean Council

PROPOSALS DUE OCTOBER 29, 2010

The Northeast Regional Ocean Council (NROC) is seeking a qualified fiscal agent to provide grant administration and related technical assistance services to support implementation of NROC work plans by states and third-party contractors. NROC is currently evaluating the most effective means of receiving and administering funding from federal grants and other sources, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's recently published solicitations related to Regional Ocean Partnerships and Comprehensive Marine Spatial Planning.¹ In general, the responsibilities of the fiscal agent would be to receive and administer grant funds on behalf of NROC and provide technical assistance in developing solicitations and managing contracts for expert services related to NROC work plan subject matter.

Background

NROC is a state and federal partnership with the goal of engaging in regional protection and balanced use of ocean and coastal resources. NROC's coordinated approach reaches across state boundaries to find and implement solutions to the region's most pressing ocean and coastal issues. In 2005, the six New England governors created NROC to facilitate the development and implementation of coordinated and collaborative regional goals and priorities to improve responses to issues and challenges that are inherently regional.

NROC's role as a regional body devoted to coastal and ocean issues is to coordinate activities and programs across New England and foster the identification and pursuit of cross-sectoral, region-wide issues and priorities. In 2007, NROC convened representatives from state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions at the region's first Ocean Congress to identify priority issues that demanded a regional response. The Ocean Congress resulted in three priority issue areas for NROC partners to address; a fourth has been developed to regionalize member states' and federal ocean planning initiatives:

- Ocean and Coastal Ecosystem Health
- Coastal Hazards Resilience (including Climate Change)
- Ocean Energy Planning and Management
- Coastal & Marine Spatial Planning (CMSP)

¹ Note that pursuant to the Final Recommendations of the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, formal responsibility for developing and implementing CMSP in the NROC region lies with a Regional Planning Body that has yet to be constituted and the workings of which in relation to NROC have yet to be defined. For the purposes of this RFQ, "NROC" means both NROC and the Regional Planning Body, subject to refinement as the administrative mechanisms of CMSP under the Final Recommendations are further developed.

The 2010-2012 committee work plans are currently available for public review and comment, and are available at the NROC website (<http://collaborate.csc.noaa.gov/nroc>).

To support implementation of these work plans, NROC intends to compete for grants recently announced under the NOAA Regional Ocean Partnership Funding Program (<http://www07.grants.gov/search/search.do?&mode=VIEW&oppId=57212>). The Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO) is focused on advancing effective coastal and ocean management through regional ocean governance and the goals for national ocean policy set out in the July 2010 Final Recommendations of the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force. The FFO identifies \$20 million, subject to appropriation and authorization to be awarded competitively to the nation's regional ocean councils, for implementation nationally of activities that contribute to achieving the priorities identified by Regional Ocean Partnerships (ROPs) while also advancing CMSP as envisioned in the national CMSP Framework, and support ROP development and governance support for administration and operations of existing ROPs, and for start-up costs of those regions beginning ROPs. Under the terms of the FFO, all state, local, territory and tribal governments, institutions of higher learning, non-profit and for-profit organizations that may receive and expend Federal funds as legal entities are eligible to apply. As a state-federal government partnership, NROC, as an organization, does not have the ability to directly receive and administer funding and is considering the use of an independent fiscal agent.

Anticipated Services

While the specific structure of NROC's grant proposal for federal funds is currently in development, NROC envisions some variation on a basic three-tier organization: 1) a decision-making Regional Planning Body (RPB) as required under the federal framework; 2) a planning management team that acts at the direction of the RPB, manages the planning process, makes recommendations to the RPB, and directs the activities of the fiscal agent; and 3) a fiscal agent that administers funds and executes contracts at the direction of the planning management team.

Within that structure, and in addition to fiscal management qualifications, NROC believes that a fiscal agent experienced with the subject material can provide a significant value-added benefit to NROC and the planning management team. Managing data, developing derived products, mapping, applied science related to human uses and the marine environment, stakeholder participation, policy development, and public outreach are components of NROC's workplan that will be addressed by the planning management team. Given the significant scale and scope of the project, consolidated planning schedule, shortage of resources, and general complexity of the overall planning process, a fiscal agent with expertise and experience with these components will provide a significant benefit through the capacity to efficiently and effectively support NROC's effort.

The primary focus of the fiscal agent would therefore be to receive and administer grant funds on behalf of NROC and provide technical assistance in developing, reviewing and managing solicitations and resultant contracts for third-party expert services related to NROC work plan subject matter, and particularly CMSP.²

² Note that NROC expects that while fiscal management in support of other work plan elements may be a component of the fiscal agent's responsibilities (managing grant funds associated with regional ocean partnership capacity-building), NROC is currently developing a discrete CMSP proposal and anticipates that the majority of the fiscal agent's effort would be related to that subject.

NROC anticipates that specific services required will include, but may not be limited to:

- Receiving and disbursing funds
- Bookkeeping and accounting
- Bill and invoice processing
- Preparing and maintaining budgets
- Tracking expenditures by task, output and/or programmatic activity
- Integrating project management of subcontracts with accounting; e.g. monthly project reports that include budgeted amounts, spent-to-date and amounts remaining, status of deliverables, etc.
- Ensuring compliance with contract terms and conditions
- Submitting required financial reports and progress reports
- Assisting in development of solicitations for third party contracts
- Assisting in technical review of solicitations
- Assisting in contract management
- Providing recommendations to planning management team as requested/directed on improving contract scope, deliverables, and outcomes, or otherwise enhancing the value and application of contract and services

Qualifications

NROC seeks to engage a fiscal agent with proven experience in successfully managing grant funds in a third-party capacity. The fiscal agent should possess the range of skills and demonstrated expertise required to effectively support regional coastal and ocean planning, including familiarity with its terms, concepts, practice, and current activities in science, management and policy. NROC will review responses on the basis of the following criteria:

- Qualifications of financial personnel and familiarity with federal grant requirements
- Experience as fiscal agent
- Qualifications of other participating personnel
- Experience with coastal and regional ocean management topics including data, science, stakeholder participation, policy development, and public outreach components
- Experience with CMSP
- Organizational and administrative efficiency
- Value-added services the fiscal agent organization can provide

Submittal

At a minimum, all responses should provide the following materials:

- A cover letter
- A statement demonstrating the respondent's understanding of the project
- A detailed description of the respondent's proposed approach and services to be provided to NROC
- A description of qualifications, including resumes, and an organizational chart for the project team
- A description of the respondent's organizational structure and administrative processes
- A summary of relevant experience and references

Northeast Regional Ocean Council – Fiscal Agent RFQ -- October 15, 2010

- Financial information including:
 - Fringe and indirect rate/administrative fee, including explanation of how it is calculated and whether it is audited
 - Annual budget for the last 5 years
 - Most recent audited financials with management letter
 - Sources of funding for the past 2 years

NROC expects the selection of a fiscal agent to be a two-step process consisting of an initial short-listing, based on the written response to this RFQ, to be followed by interviews.

Electronic responses are preferred and should be addressed to:

Ted Diers, Chair, Northeast Regional Ocean Council
ted.diers@des.nh.gov

3 copies of written responses may be sent to:

Ted Diers, Chair, NROC
NHDES
222 International Drive, Suite 175
Portsmouth, NH 03801

Responses must be received no later than 5:00 PM October 29, 2010.